

One Thanksgiving Day a family was seated around their table looking at the annual holiday bird in anticipation. From the oldest to the youngest, they were asked to express their praise. When they came to the 5 year old in the family, he began by looking at the turkey and expressing his thanks to the turkey, saying that although he had not tasted it yet that he knew it would be good. After this rather novel expression of thanksgiving, he began with a more predictable chain of credits: thanking his mother for cooking the turkey and his father for buying the turkey. But he went beyond this as well. He said, "I thank you for the checker at the grocery store who checked out the turkey. I thank you for the grocery store people who put it on the shelf. I thank you for the farmer who made it fat. I thank you for the man who made food for the turkey to eat before it died.. I thank you for the people who brought the turkey to the store." He traced that turkey all the way from its origin to his plate! And then at the end he solemnly said, "Did I leave anyone out?" His younger brother, a bit overwhelmed by all these proceedings, simply said, "God." Without a hint of being flustered, the 5 year old said, "I was about to get to Him."

There's the question! Did we ever really get to Him this past Thursday – God, that is!? Even though Thanksgiving Day is over, I'd like to think that this is still the Thanksgiving season today. I thought it might be helpful to ask and then answer two very simple but important questions. Here's the first one:

### **WHY SHOULD YOU THANK GOD?**

The Bible provides many answers to that question. Psalm 100 is a good place to start. Here we find a command to thank God, an invitation to thank God and several reasons why we should be thankful. God doesn't want us to offer mindless gratitude. No, He wants you to know why you are thankful. The first answer to our question is found in v. 3 (NLT): "Acknowledge that the LORD is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture." God is the Creator of all things and of you. He made the universe and everything in it.

One result of that fact is that because God made you, He has an eternal claim on your life. We live in a world that believes in many gods, but the God of the Bible claims to be the one, true God. God is not Allah, the god of the Muslims. God is not Brahmin, one of the many gods of Hinduism. He isn't Buddha, the prophet worshiped by Buddhists. These aren't just the same God as the One in the Bible but with different names. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the one, truly, only God – the only One who has an eternal claim on your life. Notice again how the whole earth is invited to praise God in v. 1 (NLT): "Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth!" Many human beings dislike the idea of God having a claim on their lives. It's been fascinating for me to follow something of the debate in recent years over whether evolution alone should be taught in public schools or evolution along with intelligent design. I think some of the folk who believe that only evolution should be taught are fearful that the theory of an

intelligent Designer might lead to a sense of accountability to a Designer. Many people don't want to be accountable to God. There it is, though: "He made us and we are His."

Back in 1989 the Soviet Union was still in existence but sweeping changes were occurring nonetheless. On Christmas Day, TV preacher and pastor, Dr. Robert Schuller was given the opportunity to deliver a sermon via television to a Russian audience of some 200 million people. He spoke about human dignity and its source in the God who made all of us. Afterwards, one of the Soviet leaders who had invited Schuller to speak approached him with narrow, rather cold eyes. "Very good," he said. "But what if there is no God?" Dr. Schuller answered, "Oh, but there is and you have experienced Him. You just didn't know it. He's in your thoughts. He's in your life, but you haven't recognized Him." The other man's eyes softened, widened and became moist with tears. Then, he just embraced Dr. Schuller in a powerful hug.

A second reason to thank God is the fact that He is your heavenly Father. Now, God is not called Father in Psalm 100 – as is He in other places in the Bible – but He is certainly described in fatherly terms in these verses. Look with me at v. 5 (NLT), "For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations." What's a great father like? Certainly a great father is good. He's kind rather than cruel, just rather than unfair, compassionate rather than heartless, and protective rather than abusive. God is all that and more. Certainly a great father's love endures forever. He loves his kids despite their screw ups and failures. He never stops loving his kids even if they seriously disappoint him. God is all that and more. Certainly a great father is trustworthy and faithful. He's dependable; he's reliable; he can be counted on not only to show up but to make a positive difference, too. God is all that and more. God is good. God's love endures forever. God's faithfulness is rock solid year after year, generation after generation.

There's a third reason to thank God. Quite simply, it's because He gave you Jesus to be your Savior. Psalm 100 doesn't mention that fact because the author lived hundreds of years before Jesus was born. But we find that reason expressed often in the pages of the New Testament. One short verse captures it all, "Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!" (2 Corinthians 9:15 NLT) That gift is Jesus and all that He has done for us and in us through Jesus. It's a gift so great and wonderful that it defies words. You can never exhaust all the meaning and significance that there is in Jesus. You can't ever get to the bottom of or experience the entire impact of this gift.

I was interested to know that the word for gift there in that verse means something more than an inexpensive trifle that you might just pick up on the spur of the moment and give to someone spontaneously. That's not this kind of gift! This kind of gift is more like a bequest or an endowment. It's similar to putting someone in your will for a whole bunch of money. Because of its size and significance, you have to plan well in advance how you're going to give this gift. This kind of gift will change forever the life of the one to whom you give it. Jesus is that kind of gift. Jesus was no minor trinket or shiny little bauble. He is God the Father's carefully planned out and strategically given present to the world. And when you receive this Gift it changes your life forever, does it not?

Are you really thankful for Jesus today? Really? Have you ever stopped to think what this world would be like without Jesus? There's an old story about a pastor who had a dream on one occasion of a world where Jesus had never come. No happy voices ever sang hymns or praise choruses like we did earlier. Not one church was built anywhere in his town. There were no books about Jesus in any library or bookstore. In his dream, the doorbell of his home rang out one night. When he opened the door, he found a little boy there on the doorstep asking him to come and visit his dying mother. He hurried to the home and opened his Bible to read some words of comfort and hope, but his Bible stopped at the Old Testament. He had no message of salvation to share and no promise of eternal life to offer that dying woman.

Imagine with me what it would be like if Jesus had never come to this world! No Jesus means no forgiveness of sin. No Jesus means living life with no ultimate meaning. No Jesus means no comfort in times of grief or loss. No Jesus means no reason to love or be loved, no strength in times of suffering, no peace in anxious moments. No Jesus means no eternal life when you die. No Jesus means little reason to feed the hungry, clothe the naked or shelter the homeless. What a miserable place this world would be – meaningless, empty, hollow – if God had not given you and me the gift too wonderful for words – the Lord Jesus Christ. So why should you thank God? He's your Creator. He's your heavenly Father. He's given you the greatest gift of all – His Son, Jesus. But let me ask you an additional question today on this Sunday after Thanksgiving:

## **HOW SHOULD YOU THANK GOD?**

Let's look again at Psalm 100. The first "how" is pretty easy to recognize. You should thank God with joy! Look again at v. 1 and 2 (NLT), "Shout with joy to the LORD, all the earth! Worship the LORD with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy." And then there's v. 4 (NLT), too. "Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name." Aren't you glad that it doesn't say that you have to sing well in order to sing joyfully? Some of us are more grateful about that than others! When you sing to the Lord or about the Lord, you ought to do it full throttle – with joy, with enthusiasm, with thanksgiving! It's always annoyed me, frankly, that many of us can go to an OSU football game or watch one on TV – and there we can hoot and holler all afternoon – but we can't cheer for God or shout for joy to this marvelous God who has saved us from misery in this life and hell in the next. Some of you were starting to get with it during our baptism today! Of course, there's a place for quietness in the presence of God. But I will challenge anyone who says the Bible teaches that quietness before God is the same thing as reverence. Reverence isn't being quiet; reverence is respect for God. You can reverence God and be loud. You can reverence God and be animated, joyful, excited. When you read the Bible there is all this stuff about joy – and noisy, boisterous joy at that! Thanking God ought to touch you way down deep in your emotions as well as affect your mind and your spirit. Thankfulness ought to pour out of you in a joyful spirit, a joyful laugh, a joyful song and a joyful smile.

How should you thank God? You should thank God with service. The old KJV of Psalm 100 translates v. 2 like this, “Serve the LORD with gladness....” How do you do that? Find out what you have a passion for in the Kingdom of God and do it. Discover your spiritual gifts and start using them. I believe our church can help you with that, but at the end of the day it’s your job to find them out and use them. Can’t you see someone up in heaven saying to Jesus, “Well, Pastor Rick never told me what I was good at so I did precisely nothing for You, Lord. Well, the church never asked me to do something I wanted to do so I didn’t do anything, Lord”? People who find a way to serve the Lord and then actually do it are grateful, thankful people.

Serving the Lord means obeying Him in your personal life – how you do marriage, how you do parenting, how you do singleness, how you handle money, how you express your sexuality, how you do your job, how you do your schoolwork, how you interact and relate to people. It sounds like serving God touches everything in life. You’re exactly right. No, God’s gift that’s too wonderful for words – Jesus – can’t be earned or deserved. True enough. But it does call for a response. It calls for the response of gratitude. And that gratitude is more than something you just say. It’s also something you do. That doing – day in and day out – is what it means to serve the Lord. Notice that it said, “Serve the Lord with gladness....” (Psalm 100:2 KJV) Gladness! Not because it’s your duty... not because no one else will do it if you don’t ... and not because you think it will earn you something with God. If you can’t serve the Lord with gladness, just don’t bother to serve Him at all!

How should you thank God? You should thank God consistently. What does that look like? One, you thank God consistently when you make gratitude a habit. Make it a way of life everyday. Don’t relegate thankfulness to Sundays and one day a year! Consciously express thanks. Remind yourself to be thankful. Count your blessings. What does the Bible say? “Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 NLT)

Two, you thank God consistently when you resist the attitude of entitlement. One inevitable result of living in an affluent culture is a sense of entitlement. In other words, sometimes you can get so used to being blessed that you lose the ability to be grateful. Moses warned the Jewish people about this back in the Old Testament. ““But that is the time to be careful! Beware that in your plenty you do not forget the LORD your God and disobey his commands, regulations, and decrees that I am giving you today. For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14 NLT) Most Americans Christians need to meditate on that passage!

There’s the story of a man who was sitting out on his porch one day. He sees a stranger coming down the street. This stranger walks right up to this man on the porch and hands him a \$100 bill. Without saying a word, he turns and walks away. The next day at the same time, the man is out there again sitting on his porch and waiting to see

if this generous stranger will turn up again. Sure enough, down the street he comes, up on to the porch he climbs and hands him yet another \$100 bill. Again, he walks away without saying a word. This odd ritual continued for an entire week. You can be sure that the man who was receiving the money was out on his porch every day without fail. Now on the eighth day, the stranger comes down the street as usual. But this time he just passes right on by the house and the man waiting there expectantly on the porch. The guy on the porch gets just a bit steamed. He jumps up, runs after the stranger and shouts, “Hey, where’s my \$100 bill?” An attitude of entitlement can so easily replace an attitude of thanksgiving.

Three, you thank God consistently when you can continue to be thankful in the midst of life’s difficulties. We often confuse God and life. What does that mean? When life is good, it’s easy to believe God is good. But when life is hard for some reason, we can begin to question God’s character. But life isn’t God and God isn’t life. Life is hard. Life is uncertain. Life is unfair. Life is painful. But God isn’t life. So despite what life hands you from time to time, you can still know and believe that God is good. God is love. God is faithful. God is gracious. God’s promises are real. God’s blessings endure. There’s no better time to thank God than in the hard time. There’s no better day to thank God than on the bad day. So, whether your life today is good, bad or in between, give thanks to God always and in all things.

His name was Thomas Ken – an Englishman who lived back in the 1800s. Very early in life he was abandoned by his parents and became an orphan. He knew well what it felt like to be unloved and unwanted. Through hard work and great personal sacrifice, Ken went on to become a pastor and eventually became a bishop in the Church of England. But even that esteemed position was no guarantee of comfort or peace. Because he took courageous stands against official corruption and immorality, he was put into prison by the King of England for a period of time. Then in his retirement years, Thomas Ken suffered from a painful disease that made sleeping next to impossible. Bishop Ken was a man who learned how to praise and thank God even in the toughest moments of life. We’re going to close our service today by singing a song called the Doxology. Do you know who wrote the words for the Doxology? Thomas Ken. I would guess that these words and this song are perhaps – second only to the Bible itself – the most continuously repeated words of thanksgiving to God known in the English speaking part of the world. I’d like to close our service today by singing those words and this song – the Doxology. And as you sing it, I want you to remember that the words were written by a man who knew that life isn’t God and God isn’t life, but who thanked God anyway... who was well acquainted with hard times and bad days, but who praised God anyway.